

FROM THE BOOKSHELF #154
BRIGID LAY

AUGUST 17, 1976

MASSACRE AT FALL CREEK -- JESSAMYN WEST

ANNCR: THE VOICE OF AMERICA BRINGS YOU ANOTHER IN THE WEEKLY SERIES ...FROM THE BOOKSHELF... A SERIES IN WHICH WE REPORT ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE READING. TODAY, BRIGID LAY'S REPORT ON "THE MASSACRE AT FALL CREEK" BY JESSAMYN WEST, PUBLISHED BY HARCOURT GRACE JOVANOVICH, INC. HERE IS BOOK EDITOR _____.

EDITOR: WITH "MASSACRE AT FALL CREEK," AUTHOR JESSAMYN WEST JOINS A SMALL, SELECT BODY OF AMERICAN WRITERS WHO DEPICT THE BLOOD-STREAKED CONFLICTS BETWEEN INDIANS AND WHITE MEN AS THE COMPLEX, TRAGIC DRAMAS THAT THEY WERE.

THE FICTIONAL NARRATIVE IS BASED ON THE SCANTY RECORDS OF A TRIAL THAT TOOK PLACE IN WHAT IS NOW THE STATE OF INDIANA, IN 1824. FOUR WHITE MEN WERE CHARGED WITH FIRST-DEGREE MURDER FOR THE KILLING OF NINE INDIANS -- TWO BRAVES, THREE SQUAWS AND FOUR CHILDREN. THREE OF THE MEN WERE HANGED; THE FOURTH, A YOUTH, WAS SAVED BY A LAST-MINUTE REPRIEVE. THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT WHITE MEN WERE TRIED, CONVICTED AND EXECUTED FOR THE SLAUGHTER OF INDIANS.

ON THESE BARE BONES OF HISTORY, AUTHOR WEST HAS CONSTRUCTED A POWERFUL DRAMA OF ACTION AND SUSPENSE, GIVING FULL MEASURE TO THE COMPLEX FORCES THAT SHAPED LIFE ON THE EDGE OF THE WILDERNESS. THROUGH THE CHARACTERS OF THE HANDFUL OF WHITES WHO HAVE SETTLED AROUND FALL CREEK -- THE SCENE

EDITOR: OF THE MASSACRE -- THE READER SEES THE HAZARDS THAT BESET
(CONT) THEM: THE HARSH WINTERS, THE LONELINESS, THE INGROWN HATRED
FOR THE RED MAN WITH THE CONSTANT THREAT OF VIOLENCE
LURKING IN THE UNTAMED FOREST.

BUT VIOLENCE, WHEN IT COMES TO FALL CREEK, COMES TO THE
INDIANS. THE SETTLERS HAVE GATHERED AT THE HOUSE OF A
SELF-ORDAINED PREACHER, CALEB CAPE, FOR A SUNDAY SERVICE
OF PRAYING AND HYMN-SINGING WHEN THE FIRST TERRIBLE
INTIMATION OF THE SLAUGHTER REACHES THEM...

VOICE: "IN THE OPEN DOOR OF THE CABIN, CARRIED ON A QUILT HELD AT
THE CORNERS BY FOUR MEN AND IN THE MIDDLE BY TWO WOMEN,
LAY A BLOOD-SOAKED SQUAW. 'GET THAT SQUAW OUT OF HERE.
DON'T YOU KNOW THIS IS A CHURCH MEETING?' BENSON SHOUTED.
"CALEB, WHO HAD BEEN STANDING ON THE HEARTH, HIS BACK TO
THE FIREPLACE, WENT TO HELP THE MEN PLACE THE WOMAN HE KNEW
TO BE TALKING CROW ON HIS AND LIZZIE'S BED. HE WAS SORRY
FOR THE BLOODSTAINS THAT WOULD BE LEFT ON LIZZIE'S BEST
COVERLET, BUT THERE WAS NO HELP FOR THAT. HE DIDN'T
VALUE A COVERLET MORE THAN A HUMAN BEING. THE SQUAW HAD A
WOUND NEAR THE BASE OF HER THROAT -- A GAPING BULLET HOLE,
BY ITS LOOKS.

"CALEB NEED NOT HAVE WORRIED ABOUT THE COVERLET. THE
SQUAW WOULD NOT STAY DOWN, AND NO ONE WANTED TO USE FORCE
ON A WOMAN WHOSE THROAT BUBBLED BLOODY AIR AS SHE BREATHED.
TALKING CROW FIRST SAT, THEN ROSE SLOWLY TO HER FEET. SHE
WAS GRAY FROM LOSS OF BLOOD; THE TERRIBLE BLOODY BUBBLES
BECAME LARGER WITH HER EFFORT.

VOICE:
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"'YOU KILL ME,' SHE SAID IN ENGLISH. 'I NOT DIE ON YOUR BED.' /SHE FACED GEORGE BENSON. SHE SPAT AT HIM, A BLOODY FROTH THAT RAN DOWN HIS FACE. 'WOMAN KILLER. CHILD KILLER,' SHE SAID HOARSELY. ...SHE PASSED HER HAND OVER THE FLOWING WOUND ON HER THROAT, THEN POINTED A FINGER DRIPPING BLOOD AT BENSON. 'WHEN YOU DIE, YOU REMEMBER.'"

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EDITOR: FEARING MASSIVE RETALIATION ON ALL WHITES UP AND DOWN THE FRONTIER, CALED CAPE RIDES TO THE NEAREST SETTLED TOWNSHIP TO MAKE CONTACT WITH THE INDIAN AGENT, WHO WILL PROVE TO THE INDIANS THAT WHITE MAN'S JUSTICE IS THE SAME FOR ALL. THE ACTION THEN MOVES TO THE SCENE OF THE TRIAL: THE BEST LAWYERS ARE RECRUITED FOR BOTH PROSECUTION AND DEFENCE, THE PRISONERS ARE PENNED UP IN A MAKESHIFT JAIL WITH THEIR FAMILIES NEAR BY, THE INDIANS -- OF THE SENECA TRIBE -- SEND A DELEGATION TO WATCH THE PROCEEDINGS, AND THROUGH THESE MANY ELEMENTS FLOW THE SHIFTING CURRENTS OF PUBLIC OPINION AND PRIVATE EMOTION.

REFLECTING THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE EVENT ARE THE THOUGHTS OF THE JUDGE, AMOS GOWAN. HE WATCHES THE JURORS FILE OUT AFTER THEY HAVE HEARD OF THE BRUTAL CLUBBING OF A YOUNG INDIAN BOY, FOLDED LEAF, TOLD BY THE YOUNG SON OF CALED CAPE...

VOICE: "WHAT WRONG HAD THAT INDIAN BOY DONE BESIDES BEING BORN RED? GUILT OR INNOCENCE WAS THEIR RESPONSIBILITY. /LIFE

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OR DEATH WAS HIS. HE WANTED TO PUT HIS FACE AS LOW IN HIS HANDS AS THAT BOY HAD, HEARING AGAIN A HEAD BREAK OPEN WITH THE SOUND OF A PUMPKIN BUSTED FOR CATTLE FOOD,

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AND CRY. HE WANTED TO, BUT HE WAS A MAN, NOT A BOY AND A JUDGE, TO BOOT; WHICH IS HARDLY A HUMAN BEING, HE SOMETIMES THOUGHT... WHAT DID HE HAVE? MCGOWAN ASKED HIMSELF. THE LAW AND HIS CONSCIENCE. AND THE TERRIBLE KNOWLEDGE THAT ALL COURTS UP TO THIS TIME HAD IGNORED THE LAW. AND THAT BENSON AND THE OTHERS HAD KILLED OUT OF KNOWLEDGE OF THIS FACT."

EDITOR: INTERWOVEN WITH THE DRAMATIC ACTION IN THE COURTROOM, IS THE GROWING LOVE BETWEEN CALED CAPE'S DAUGHTER, HANNAH, AND A YOUNG LAWYER FOR THE DEFENCE, AND THE MYSTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE SENECA. THE FICTIONAL INDIAN, BLACK ANTLER, CARRIES ON THE TEACHINGS OF A REAL SEER OF THE SENECA, HANDSOME LAKE THEY ILLUMINE FOR THE READER MANY OF THE PRINCIPLES OF THEIR LITTLE-UNDERSTOOD INDIAN RELIGION. AND FROM BLACK ANTLER COMES THE CONCLUSION TO THIS STORY OF A DRAMATIC CLASH BETWEEN ALIEN CULTURES...

VOICE: "THE BODIES OF MEN VANISHED; BUT THEIR WORDS AND WISDOM LIVED ON. THEIR SPIRITS DID NOT DIE. THE SUN AND THE EARTH REMAINED. SUN AND EARTH HAD MOTHERED AND FATHERED HIM. THE ANIMALS, AS MUCH AS FOLDED LEAF AND HANDSOME LAKE, WERE HIS BROTHERS. HE KNELT AND SCOOPED UP A HANDFUL OF THE ALREADY SUN-WARMED EARTH. HE HELD HIS TWO FISTS CLENCHED ON EARTH, THEN TURNED EARTH'S BOVITY SUNWARD IN THE OLD INDIAN GESTURE OF WORSHIP. BLACK ANTLER'S HANDS, REACHING UPWARD, BLOTTED OUT THE HANGMAN'S ROPE. THE EARTH HIS HANDS HELD; THE NAMES HIS SPIRIT HONORED: WHAT ELSE DID A MAN HAVE?"

EDITOR: JESSAMYN WEST'S "THE MASSACRE AT FALL CREEK" WAS A CHOICE OF THE LITERARY GUILD AND WAS ON THE NEW YORK TIMES' BEST SELLER LIST FOR FOUR MONTHS.

ANNCR: YOU HAVE BEEN LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF AMERICA WEEKLY PROGRAM FROM THE BOOKSHELF, IN WHICH WE REPORT ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE READING. TODAY'S SELECTION WAS "THE MASSACRE AT FALL CREEK" BY JESSAMYN WEST. JOIN US AGAIN NEXT WEEK (AT THE SAME TIME) FOR ANOTHER SELECTION FROM THE BOOKSHELF. THIS IS

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